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## WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING WITH COVID-19 IN ECUADOR ?

After the case of Corona virus patient zero in the world on November 17, 2019, many countries, thinking on how extremely rapid could the virus spread thank to globalization, took some prevention and protection policies.

Ecuador, at that time was still trying to recover from a series of violent episodes unleashed by popular rejection of economic measures proposed by the Government in response of an economic crisis that has dragged the country. With this scenario, little or nothing was heard in the country about the virus that was already becoming world news.

The first case of COVID 19 in Ecuador was registered on February 29, 2020, it was a 71-year-old woman who arrived on February 14 from Spain, a country that has big ties to Ecuador due to the number of Ecuadorian migrants that inhabit in Spain, days before, there had been a suspicion with a citizen of Asia whose diagnosis by corona virus was ruled out. For March 13, the first infected person in the country died.

Today, May 04, 2020, official data shows a total of 31,881 confirmed cases, and 2,905 people died in the context of the coronavirus, 1569 deaths confirmed by COVID-19 and 1,336 deaths from suspected disease (source: Ecuador COE, official data base).

Several scandals have surrounded the situation of the pandemic in Ecuador, most of them have been scandals carried out by political figures in the country, like a sample we have: Misguided and out of place responses and actions ranging from Assembly members of the National Parliament attending telework sessions from their pools, Mayor of the most affected city, prohibiting the arrival of humanitarian flights, the resignation of the Minister of Health, denouncing the lack of budget, protection supplies and the hiring of people not prepared to face the situation, among others.

Doctors and health personnel do not have adequate protection equipment and medical supplies, confinement and the fact that the vast majority of people have informal jobs, many of which are carried out on the streets, has deepened the economic crisis in many people that, although they would like to respect quarantine, do not have adequate sources to eat every day and break the confinement in search of daily sustenance, this has already caused scenes of social violence between citizens and authorities.

Complaints have been registered with human rights organizations such as the Office of the Ombudsman and several recordings of military and police abuses have been released during operations carried out to enforce the restrictions of the state of emergency. For example, on April 4, a 19-year-old boy drowned in a river in Los Ríos province while trying to flee a police checkpoint for passing the curfew hour.

In crisis, stress and confinement situations, people's mental health is affected and violent acts multiply, therefore there is an increase in violence in all its forms, with the most vulnerable groups being boys, girls and women, refugees, etc. Domestic violence has been exacerbated, Men have also been victims of gender prejudice, many of them are forced to be the ones who must go out to bring their livelihoods to the home and this social pressure has led them to increase thefts, robberies, looting and violence in general.

As for migrants, new xenophobia outbreaks have increased due to humanitarian aid for this vulnerable group and outbreaks of xenophobia, violence and discrimination have been generated in the case of Asian people. Internally, indigenous populations and nationalities, whose way of life, culture and traditions are different, are far from the health and government systems and there is no state presence or protection according to their needs and peculiarities.

Winter season has triggered floods and their consequences in various regions of the country.

Economically, Ecuador has been dragging economic problems for years and hit by the consequences of the national strike in October 2019. With the global crisis of the corona virus, exports and prices of products such as flowers, bananas, cocoa and shrimp fell, to make matters worse, Ecuadorian oil price fell historically at -30 dollars per barrel, and the government decision of paying international debts has not been viewed favorably, although the payment would seek keeping the line of credit open, most agree that such payment in the midst of a health emergency is not a sensible decision. With all this, despite the promises made by the Government, hundreds of people have already been fired, banks do not offer many options for making loans payments more flexible.

Of all this, the most shocking have undoubtedly been the images and videos circulating in networks worldwide about death bodies being abandoned or cremated in the streets or at sea, stories of disappearances of the bodies told by desperate relatives who are looking for burying their deceased loved ones, testimonies of people who have had to live with death bodies of their relatives for weeks and the health and psychological consequences that all this entails, although it is true that they may be circulating on fake news about this, Government claims that there is a kind of conspiracy dedicated to leak fake news to destabilize the government but this attempt of selling the world a story of having everything under control is not justified, this theory has no place in such a globalized world and with so much access to information that allows contrasting it, verifying that, as stated, there are disinformation, but there are also proven facts of this sad reality and contradictions between the available official data from official sources of information, the poor health response, and the mismanagement of corpses that has caused a health crisis in the city most affected by the pandemic is a fact and a reality that is affecting hundreds of Ecuadorians.

Despite all this bleak and uncertain scenario, we should also mention that there are great efforts of civil organizations and international support organizations, but especially of Ecuadorian people.

Although it is true that it has been really hard for people to maintain confinement mainly due to the urgent need to try to cover their basic needs, it is also true that the Ecuadorian people are hard-working, struggling and very generous people, many of them are seen on the streets offering help to each other, generating donations or fundraising initiatives, some create neighborhood brigades to protect their elderly neighbors or individuals, there are clothing factories that are manufacturing face masks for health personnel, volunteers who bring smiles and play with children, university students developing projects to make medical implements like manual respirators, people sharing tips of self-care or aid organizations for people who need it, neighbors sharing food and many more actions that denote that the people of Ecuador are a united and strong community, who surely thanks to their tenacity and the big hearts of their people will know how to get through this uncertainty and rise up once again.

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